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news

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FILE COPY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

GRACE BAIR OF RANTOUL REPRESENTS COLLEGE'S PAST

CHARLESTON, IL.--"My experience at Eastern was instrumental in the development of everything I did after that. The influence of the faculty is what guided my other experiences and I am grateful to all of them," said Grace Thompson Bair of Rantoul, the first graduate of what is now the Eastern Illinois University Lumpkin College of Business.

Bair recently returned to her alma mater to be honored by the College. During her visit, EIU President Stanley Rives presented her with a 1939 commencement program, which lists her as the salutatorian of her class, and a key ring commemorating the 50th anniversary of the College of Business.

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Dr. Theodore Ivarie, Dean of the Lumpkin College of Business, said the reunion with Bair is one way the College can maintain an association with its heritage.

"I am so proud of what the College is doing. I feel very lucky to be here and was so overwhelmed to receive this honor," Bair said during a luncheon in her honor.

She said she became inspired by members of the business faculty who did more than was expected and instilled in her that she was going to be successful in life.

"I learned how to teach and what to teach," according to Bair, who said three of her instructors, Dr. Earl Dickerson, Dr. Stanley Robinson and the late Dr. Jim Thompson, encouraged her to further her education which led her to teach successfully for 30 years.

After graduating from Eastern, Bair was a secretary to EIU President Robert Buzzard and later taught business courses at Ashmore High School. "My students did well in contests, etc., and at the end of the year, the school offered me a 50 percent increase in salary if I would remain with them; and I was tempted."

"The kindness of the members of the EIU business faculty gave me a different option. Every year, Eastern offered one graduate scholarship to the University of Illinois. The year I graduated, the valedictorian earned it. But in the next class, there was no person whom the faculty could agree. So, at the suggestion of the business professors, they went back to my class and I received the scholarship," Bair said.

"Coming out of the Depression, I was so delighted to be in a field where there were job opportunities," said Bair, who also taught in Litchfield, Bloomington and Rantoul and was a grade school principal in Urbana.

"I often suggested to the youngsters whom I taught that Eastern would be a fine place to go," she commented.

As her husband became ill, she ended her teaching career and became an antique dealer. She still has a shop in her home and enjoys doing antique shows.

She and her husband, the late Ernest Bair, have two adopted children, Judy, a teacher, and Jim, who is in law school. She also has five grandchildren.

She serves as president of the Rantoul Woman's Club and plays the piano for the Rantoul Senior Citizens and Rantoul Eastern Star.

She also has served as charter president of both the Rantoul City Schools Education Association and Rantoul Business and Professional Women's Club and as secretary to Friends of the Rantoul Library.